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SUBJECT: PRT TEAM LEADERS CONFERENCE: TRANSITION ISSUES AND
PREPARATION FOR ELECTIONS

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Embassy Baghdad's Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) held its quarterly Team Leaders Conference of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) at Embassy Baghdad. Embassy, NEA, and military officials briefed Team Leaders on the state of play regarding the national election scheduled for March 7, and held lengthy discussions about the roles of the PRTs in the coming 18 months as the military continued its planned troop drawdown. The Embassy emphasized that it would be looking to the PRTs for reporting and analysis during the pre- and post-electoral period, and briefed on the Embassy's observation efforts on and around Election Day. In break-out and question-and-answer sections, OPA and the Team Leaders discussed current political trends in the country as well as USG priorities during this transition period, including the 2010 elections, public diplomacy and plans for five longer-term provincial posts. END SUMMARY.

INTRODUCTION: IRAQ DURING THE TRANSITION

[1](#)2. (SBU) In his welcoming remarks, AMB Hill emphasized that Iraq was on the verge of a transformation. With a raft of oil tenders coming out, the country stands poised in the coming years to overtake both Iran and Libya in terms of daily production. The economy is gradually stabilizing, with the GOI able to set forth and fund its own priorities, such as health care and education. Meanwhile, security improvements have forced terror cells to seek out softer and softer targets. With the election fast approaching, however, internal Iraqi politics remain dynamic, and it could take months for a new government to be seated, AMB warned the Team Leaders. For the Embassy, the next year will also be one of transition as the military continues its draw-down, the PRTs plan for their summer 2011 scale-back, and plans move forward for the creation of enduring presence posts (EPPs). Italian AMB Mellani joined AMB Hill in praising the work of the PRTs and underscored the importance of the Italian-American relationship in the ongoing process of helping Iraq.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Political Counselor pointed to the upcoming election and seating of a new government as the beginning of a year of change for both the GOI and the U.S. mission, as U.S. forces continue to draw down their presence. She provided an overview of the pre-election period and the recent de-Ba'athification crisis, saying the USG response to the controversy emphasized the importance of an institutionalized and transparent process over preference for any particular outcome. She also thanked the PRTs for their contributions to political reporting, emphasizing their importance as the eyes and ears of the Embassy on the ground in the various provinces.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Assistant Chief of Mission for Assistance Transition (ACM) identified improving budget execution, building institutions, and increasing Iraq's appetite for free trade as areas of focus for her office, and highlighted the key role PRTs play in supporting the Embassy's goals at the provincial level. Now that the PRTs are out of the "bricks and mortar" business, it was important for the teams to focus

on more traditional missions, like supporting U.S. and international business efforts in the provinces, she said.

THE VIEW FROM USF-I

¶5. (SBU) General Raymond Odierno, Commanding General of U.S. Forces-Iraq (USF-I), laid out his vision of developing a wide base of partnerships in order to make Iraq a long term strategic partner and promote long-term stability in the region. The first prong of this strategy is developing security skills in the areas of border security, foreign military sales, and training. The second category for development is economic, specifically luring foreign investment, developing a tourism industry, solidifying the banking sector, creating jobs and developing the oil industry. Finally, General Odierno emphasized the need for Iraq to become an international player by developing and improving diplomatic representation at embassies, the World Trade Organization, and in the United Nations. General Odierno cited the PRTs as crucial partners in helping Iraqis develop these capabilities, and has included USF-I's support to PRTs in the Joint Campaign Plan (JCP).

¶6. (SBU) USF-I Deputy Commanding General-Operations (DCG) provided an overview of the military's current operating environment, citing Sunni disenfranchisement, Shi'a opportunism (including Iranian meddling), and Arab-Kurd tension as the greatest threats to stability. He assured the team leaders that USF-I was committed to supporting all 16 PRTs through June 2011 and said training for incoming Advise and Assist Brigades (AAB) was continuously refined to reflect

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the move to stability operations and U.S. civilian primacy. DCG praised the civilian-military partnerships developed by the PRTs, and encouraged the teams to continue wielding their considerable influence in support of mission goals.

THE JOINT CAMPAIGN PLAN

¶7. (SBU) Political-Military Minister Counselor (PMMC) updated Team Leaders on the current status of the JCP. The two-year JCP, based in large part on the President's Camp LeJeune speech, brings together political, economic, rule of law and security elements, determining how to achieve the goals through 2011 so that the civilian presence that takes over the process in 2012 is teed up for success. PMMC and Team Leaders also addressed the necessary balance between the Embassy's role in maintaining cohesion of activities and goals and the PRTs role in providing local context. That said, it is essential that the process also retain the local context that the PRT can provide.

THE 2010 NATIONAL ELECTION

¶8. (SBU) A panel discussion, focused on the March 7 parliamentary elections, highlighted the USG's support for a credible, legitimate, and Iraqi-led process. Representatives from the Political Section, OPA, and USAID announced an Embassy observation effort that will take into account the Security Forces Agreement. The panelists emphasized, that while international observation is valued a far more important guarantor of the Iraqi elections process will be the roughly 200,000 trained domestic observers who will oversee the electoral process in every polling location on Election Day. The PRTs will also play a vital reporting role during the process, working their contacts for information and ensuring the Embassy has a clear picture of the situation country-wide. The panelists also announced a series of in-depth election briefings for early February that would update the PRTs on election-day modalities and observation and reporting issues.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND THE PRTS

¶9. (SBU) In a session on public diplomacy, the Director of USF-I Civil Affairs and the Embassy Regional Coordinator for Public Affairs both praised the excellent coordination between military and PRT elements. They emphasized the importance of the Iraqi and western media's message of stability and growth to these differing audiences. Several Team Leaders pointed out that the media gap would get filled by other sources if Embassy, USF-I, and PRTs do not fill it. Embassy Public Affairs described how the Embassy had been increasing press outreach over the last several months, as well as efforts to engage local and western media on the positive impact PRTs are having throughout the country.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS FOCUS ON OIL, SECTARIAN DIVISIONS

¶10. (SBU) Four panel discussions featured dialogue on: Sunni-Shi'a cleavages, the Kurdish situation, oil and gas development, and Iranian influence. The Kurdish session provoked a spirited exchange on USG priorities in the region and the prospects of a settlement. Team Leaders heading northern PRTs expressed the desire for increased coordination with the Embassy as policy on this issue continues to evolve.

In the oil and gas session, representatives from the Economic Section discussed the hydrocarbons law, stressing that there would be no further progress in this area until after the seating of a new government.

MANAGEMENT/RESOURCE SUPPORT TO THE PRTS

¶11. (SBU) Deputy Management Counselor focused on support that the Embassy's Management Section provides to the PRTs. She described the system of Regional Management Officers (RMOs), dedicated staff assigned to provide GSO support to the PRTs. Team Leaders emphasized a desire for greater direct interaction with RMOs, and encouraged them to visit their teams in the field. Embassy Information Management Officer announced the deployment of Blackberrys to each PRT in time for the elections. He also outlined the program to upgrade unclassified internet capacity of priority PRTs (the so-called &VSAT8 upgrade) over the next three months.

¶12. (SBU) In a session on mission staffing, ACM Haslach, Deputy Management Counselor, and representatives from USAID

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and OPA addressed contract renewals and other staffing concerns. ACM Haslach stated that her office is working to identify funding to retain USG interagency detailees from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Department of Justice, as well as engineers and USAID personnel for the PRTs until the end of their mission in Summer 2011. She also stated that she is requesting limited authority to continue hiring subject matter experts, i.e. &3161s8, once the Iraq Transition Assistance Office (ITAO) hiring authority expires in the spring.

¶13. (SBU) For its part, USAID pledged to provide a representative on each PRT through summer 2011. However, USAID anticipates operating under a scheme of regional platforms with teams stationed in north, south and central regions of Iraq. USAID emphasized that this arrangement would not affect the footprint of the implementing partners.

ENDURING PRESENCE POSTS

¶14. (SBU) As the military continues its withdrawal and the

PRTs prepare to close in 2011, the Embassy is moving forward on plans to assess the locations for five future enduring presence posts. The Management Section announced the deployment of a 14-person EPP assessment team which would travel to PRTs in all prospective EPP locations during the month of February.

PRT OPERATONAL PRIORITIES

¶15. (SBU) Team Leaders' stressed the importance of keeping PRTs adequately staffed. They also highlighted the value of positive working relationships between themselves and OPA, and between OPA and tbe Political Section. The Team Leaders welcomed more Embassy input on policies at the provincial level. In a separate session, QRF officers and OPA discussed with PRTs how they could fund projects to support the March 7 national election.

HILL